WORKING TOGETHER AS A SYSTEM?
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BC POST-SECONDARY SYSTEM IN THE FIRST DECADE OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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WORKING TOGETHER AS A SYSTEM?

I've been asked to speak to you today on the following issues:

1) HOW DO INSTITUTIONS WORK TOGETHER FOR THE GOOD OF THE PROVINCE AS A WHOLE?
2) WHAT ARE THE SYSTEM ISSUES THAT WILL FACE US DURING THE NEXT DECADE?
3) WHAT AGENCIES EXIST TO FACILITATE SYSTEM CO-OPERATION?
4) WHAT IS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY AND K-12 SECTORS?

I'm going to give you "one persons response" to these questions - - and then go beyond them to present an explanation for my comments, and finally to conclude with what I think is an appropriate set of recommendations as to how government, and our educational institutions should act so as to insure the future development of post-secondary education in this province at a time of rapid change in our society. But first I should say clearly that these are my personal comments, based on 33 years of experience in post-secondary education in this province, and that they do not necessarily reflect the views of my colleagues on the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer.

In "Building for the Next Generation"[1], the Joint Council begins its document with "the premise that BC of all the provinces has probably the best array of post-secondary institutions." I agree! In fact I don't think there is any doubt but that our system in BC is the envy of governments in the rest of the country, especially in terms of student transfer, program articulation, and student satisfaction. But, as "Building for the Next Generation" points out, the system is not perfect - - the authors indicate that in the view of the Joint Council, at least three major issues need to be tackled in the near future: institutional autonomy, access, and funding.

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[1] Building For the Next Generation. Joint Council for the Advanced Education Council of British Columbia. Sept. 26, 2000.

I'm going to comment further on these issues, and then add others to the list. In doing so, I'm going to try to be provocative. I'm going to take the risk of looking a little way into the future, anticipating both change in our society and the changes I believe our institutions must embrace if they are to successfully meet the challenges they will face in the first decade of the new millennium. The primary point I want to make is that good as our system is now, it must be prepared to adapt rapidly to change as society evolves.

Changes in Society and New Challenges for Post-secondary Education

Arthur E. Levine, President of the Teachers College at Columbia University, recently published an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education[2] in which he outlined several major forces in the global society which have the power to transform our colleges and universities:

- Shifting demographics;
- New technologies;
- The entrance of commercial organisations into higher education;
- Changing relationships between colleges and governments, and
- The move from an industrial to an information society.

He went on to speak to "9 Inevitable Changes" that he foresaw as a result of these forces. We don't have the time here to look at these changes in detail, but we will at least take a look at the first four of the forces, and the way they will effect us here in BC in the near future.

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[2] Arthur E. Levine. The Future of Colleges: 9 Inevitable Changes. The Chronicle of Higher Education. October. 27, 2000.

Shifting Demographics

Baby boomers' children are banging on our doors. Demand for student placements are at an all time high, and is growing. A recent article in the Vancouver Sun indicated that record-high marks are needed for entrance from grade 12 to the universities.[3] A 78% average is now the minimum for admission to first year arts, while at least 83% is required for first year science. This is up from 70% in arts and 67% in science 10 years ago. The universities claim that the increase in entrance requirements is a result of growing demand and a lack of funding necessary to accommodate it. They state that they aim to admit no more new students than the number for which they are funded. Moreover, the universities state they will be admitting a higher percentage of each years new student intake from grade 12, and that they will be taking in fewer transfer students. This policy will have a cascading effect; new students who apply but are not admitted will fall back on the college/university college system, and university colleges will become increasingly more attractive to transfer students as receiving institutions.

Student access to quality education will become an increasingly major problem for government, and also for the post secondary system Past efforts to increase student access have produced the fastest growth rate in full-time student participation across Canada, but we still trail all other provinces in the rate of full-time participation leading to degree completion. We remain a net importer of educated talent and our students do not have the same opportunity to complete a degree in their home province as other Canadians, especially at the baccalaureate level. This general problem is most extreme in the lower mainland, which has the highest growth rate in Canada for the 18-24 year old age cohort.

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[3] Rebecca Wigod, Record-high marks needed for BC Universities. Vancouver Sun. September 2000.

Higher education also will become more individualised. More and more mature students are exhibiting a wide variety of educational needs. Thus the students, not the institutions will set the educational agenda in the future. Mature students want to study in programs they believe to be relevant to their futures, not those which institutions think they should want to study. Moreover, these students want to be able to receive their education at a time and place of their choosing. And, they want to be able to choose from a variety of knowledge providers. In effect, with appropriate advice, they want to be able to build their own educational programs so as to meet what they perceive to be their individual needs. This will have a radical effect on our traditional institutional values, program development and delivery systems. It will also mean that we will have to re-evaluate credit and transfer policies.

Coupled with these changes in the student population is the issue of an ageing faculty and the need for staff renewal. Pressures surrounding retirement vacancies and competitive recruiting will become increasingly acute. In the universities alone, 1200 faculty will reach retirement age during the 10 years ending in August, 2009. Another 850 vacancies through early retirement and resignations are projected, total 2050 university faculty positions to fill over the period.

I don't have comparable data for the colleges and university colleges, but there is no reason to believe that your situation will be any better. On the contrary, not only will you be facing the loss of qualified personnel through retirements, but you will have difficulty in retaining your best junior faculty as the universities across the country initiate aggressive recruiting campaigns. Your present salary system presents you with an obvious comparative disadvantage in faculty recruitment and retention. Under the government controls in force at this time you can offer your faculty only about 2/3rds that received by university faculty with comparable seniority. And consider this, even with better salaries and working conditions than you can offer, BC universities are at a

comparative disadvantage internationally in many key disciplines. At SFU in the 1999/2000 academic year, the Faculty of Business Administration set out to fill nine empty positions. Thirteen offers were made and only three accepted. In the finance area, all offers were declined; in human resources management, four of five offers were declined. Salary competition appeared to be the determining factor. Clearly faculty salaries, work loads, recruitment and retention will be one of the major challenges facing your institutions in the first decade of the new century.

New technologies:

Growth in technology-based delivery systems and institutions has literally exploded over the past 10 years. Competition between traditional brick and mortar institutions (brick institutions) and on line education (click institutions) is growing rapidly and will continue to do so over the next decade. The Virtual university, Open Universities, Tele-learning networks, and the Global Educators Network are only a few of the technology-based institutions which are encouraging the rise of global universities which transcend national boundaries.

Arthur Levine notes that three types of institutions have emerged. The "brick" universities and colleges, the "click" universities and colleges, and the "brick and click" institutions. Clearly if our traditional "brick" institutions are to remain competitive in the new global society they must become "brick and click" institutions. This requires a serious commitment to technology-based infrastructure and human resources.

The Entrance of Commercial Organisations into Higher Education

Historically, the traditional university and college systems have had a virtual monopoly over post-secondary education. That is no longer the case. According to 1998 survey data assembled by our Ministry (MAETT), BC now leads the country in the number of private training and educational institutions. We have 1,140 private institutions serving 190,000 students. The great majority of these private training

establishments focus on vocational education; but well over 50 are accredited to provide some form of degree programming, and the students at 230 private institutions are eligible for student assistance. These figures do not include institutions physically located outside BC that offer their courses and credentials at a distance, often through on-line technologies.

The growing presence of private educational institutions raises questions about standards, faculty recruitment and retention, competition for students and other issues. A major issue here is that for-profit providers are interested only in teaching, and will compete with our system solely in the realm of instruction. To the extent that our publicly funded institutions lose out to these new competitors, financial support from both government and private sources for two activities vital to our communities will be lost – research and service. The impact of private education on our publicly funded institutions could become significant in coming years. You should be paying close attention to these developments.

Changing Relationships with Government

Frankly, I think the past relationship between our system and the provincial government has been pretty good. After all, they've developed and funded the system we believe is overall, the best in Canada. They've also funded the development of two arms- length agencies that are serving us well: BCCAT and C2T2. But that doesn't mean that the relationship can't be improved. In "Building for the Next Generation" your Council points to several areas where such improvement can be made: more institutional autonomy, strategies for collaboration, increased access and success, and more rational funding. I endorse these suggestions and emphasise especially the need for a more rational funding process. The adoption of some form of multi-year funding arrangement is crucial. Often annual budgets are not handed down by government until

June or even July when, as you know, our budget year begins April 1. This uncertainty makes any kind of long term planning difficult, if not impossible.

Another issue has emerged which must be attended to. The role –or place- of the university colleges in the system must be rethought. The university colleges have thus far been an unbridled success, but they are at a critical stage in their development. They have enormous potential to serve their regions, and the province, with distinction. But if they are to do so they must be removed from the constraints of the current Colleges and Institutes Act. The Act provides them with the authority to grant degrees and to establish the academic infrastructure to do so, but at the same time hamstrings them by offering them fewer dollars per student than the universities receive, and limiting their academic salaries to the point where they will not be competitive in the market I've described above.

I'm not arguing here that the university colleges should be removed from the Colleges and Institutes Act and governed by the Universities Act. They have, after all, a mandate which distinguishes them from the universities . But their mandate also is different that those of the colleges and institutes. Rather I suggest that a revision of the current Colleges and Institutes Act be legislated or that a new, separate University College Act be legislated. The Act should acknowledge the mandated themes of comprehensiveness, learner centerdness, accessibility and community focus. It should enshrine their regional focus and constrain them from the natural inclination some of their faculty may have to "become universities", and it should limit their drift into traditional graduate programming.

So, getting back to our agenda, these are some of the more important system issues I see us having to face in the next decade. There likely are others I have missed.

How do Institutions Work Together for the Good of the System

The answer is that they don't, really! In fact the present three tiered system makes it almost impossible to work together to jointly plan for the future of the System as a whole. And because the system is composed of three separate levels of institutions, there is no formal mechanism which exists to undertake joint planning . We're essentially competing with each other for a portion of a fixed financial pie.

The universities have the University Presidents Council, you have the Council of CEO's within AECBC, and the university colleges have recently formed the BC University College Consortium. To my knowledge, there has never been an occasion where all these groups of CEO's have met together to discuss issues of common concern. Government has not been presented system-based representation on fundamental issues, such as funding. Instead, there presently is only independent lobbying. Unfortunately, the universities have not joined you on the Council, and new tensions are emerging over the development of the university colleges

I see real danger here, because if we cannot find a way to work together as a system, government has the opportunity and the excuse, to limit our autonomy; not, as your Councils' Report suggests, enhance it. One only need look at state systems across the border in the United States to see examples of governments limiting institutional autonomy.

Now, having said this, I hasten to add that there are some agencies which do facilitate and support co-operation across the whole system.

The BC Council on Admissions and Transfer, which I co-chair, is one such agency, and in fact it works exceptionally well. BCCAT uses a collegial approach to resolve difficult system admission and transfer issues. It's fair to say that under BCCAT's guidance and persuasion, we have developed a student transfer system that has generated a high level of student satisfaction and is the envy of systems across

Canada. Our 69 disciplinary articulation committees are especially noteworthy. They are the only direct forum I know of which brings together faculty from all three tiers of our system.

The Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology (C2T2) also is mandated to work across the system. It promotes and encourages system-wide innovation in teaching and learning and is working toward long-term, systemic improvements in education. There are others, such as the College-Institute Educators Association of BC (CIEA) and your own Advanced Education Council. What is missing though is a forum for articulation of issues of common concern at the highest levels of institutional management. The development of such an forum should be a major priority for all of us.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This is an interesting period in the evolution of BC's post-secondary system. We are in the midst of a period of dramatic change. Our challenge is to find a new way to do business, and it's important that we work together to do so. If we don't take the initiative ourselves, we will face the possibility of government intervention , and will turn over part of our future development potential to competing private institutions. We need to anticipate change by looking into the future and posturing ourselves to meet the evolving demands of our society and our new generations of students.

Recommendations:

1. Endorse the recommendations in "Building for the Next Generation."
2. Recognise that the educational needs of society are changing and position your institutions to respond to these changes.
3. Design new pedagogy to better utilise technology. Become "brick and click" institutions.
4. Prepare yourselves for the aggressive, competitive sellers market looming in faculty recruitment and retention.

5. Be prepared to develop symbiotic relationships with private institutions. They are a reality and we must develop policy to relate to them.
6. Continue to work toward improving our relationship with government and with each other. Find a way to bring the universities to the table with you.
7. Support the revision of the current Colleges and Institutes Act or the development of a University College Act which will clearly articulate the unique mandate of the university colleges and fund them separately and properly.

Footnotes

[1] Building For the Next Generation. Joint Council for the Advanced Education Council of British Columbia. Sept. 26, 2000.

[2] Arthur E. Levine. The Future of Colleges: 9 Inevitable Changes. The Chronicle of Higher Education. October. 27, 2000.

[3] Rebecca Wigod, Record-high marks needed for BC Universities. Vancouver Sun. September 2000.